

# THE DYNAMICS OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN ISRAEL

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Israel was founded in 1948 in the midst of war and hardship, a period personified by the brave men and women driven by a sense of historic mission to risk everything to protect Jewish lives from assault and military attack. The generation that fought for a Jewish state also had to structure government activities that demanded a different kind of boldness in a context tested not by first power but by competing interest goals.<sup>1</sup> Since the creation of the state of Israel, the Jewish population has been defined by military service. The Israeli citizen was ultimately there to serve in its war against the Arab world. Despite recurrent wars and a perpetual state of alert, Israel has profoundly failed to become a military state.<sup>2</sup> Israel is the only post-World War II democracy in the world that has been in a state of constant war with its neighbours. Its military machine is among the largest in the world relative to its population; 621,500 men and women serve in three branches of Israel Defense Forces (IDF) both in Regular and Reserves troops.<sup>3</sup> Most other countries that achieved independence after World War II have been plagued by multiple military coups, and many states in the

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1. Efraim Karsh, *Israel: The First Hundred Years. Vol. 1 Israel's Transition from Community to State* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 45.
2. Alex Chapman, *Begin's Israel, Mubarak's Egypt* (London: Wyndham Publications Ltd. 1983), p. 52.
3. See, "Military Threats to Israel: Middle East Military Balance," *Jewish Virtual Library*, URL: [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Threats\\_to\\_Israel/milbal.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Threats_to_Israel/milbal.html), accessed on July 23, 2013.

West Asia were until recently governed by officers in military uniform. Unlike in other West Asian countries the military has never seized power in Israel.

### EMERGENCE OF ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES (IDF)

The Israel Defense Forces was created in 1948 in the midst of the war of Independence out of military units, *Haganah*.<sup>4</sup> The first Jewish military was charged with protecting a nation still reeling from the genocide of European Jewry. The *Haganah* is the military force of the Jewish people which strives for political independence of Israel. In fact in 1940, the existing High Command of the *Haganah* simply became the high command of the IDF. On the civilian side, there was no defence department in the Jewish shadow administration in Palestine until the 1940s. David Ben-Gurion, Israeli's first Prime Minister and Defence Minister, decided against calling it the Ministry of Defence using the Hebrew word *Haganah*, but instead chose the word *Bitahon*, meaning Security.<sup>5</sup> The growth of an autonomous power base in defence establishment has been a crucial factor in the balance in Civil-Military relations. The early settlers organised their own community defence force, *Hashomer* (the guards) and the *Haganah* (the defence force) to defend their vulnerable territory. Hence, at the beginning it had no historical traditions, a national glory, ceremonial uniforms and parades, or a conventional hierarchy and discipline.<sup>6</sup>

The Defence Service Law of 1949 established the legal basis of the IDF was closely patterned on the citizen army of Switzerland and has two distinctive components. The Regular Service (*Sherut Sadir*) is on active duty. Within the Regular Service, the Permanent Service (*Sherut Kevah*) comprises career commissioned and non-commissioned officers who form the command and administrative structure of the armed forces. The Conscript Service (*Sherut Hovav*) is made up of men and women.<sup>7</sup> Except for the Druze and Bedouin,

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4. It was a part-time citizen's defence force.

5. n.3, p. 54.

6. Alex Chapman, n. 2, pp. 52-53.

7. Meri Report: *Israel*, Middle East Research Institute, University of Pennsylvania (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 7.

Arab citizens of Israel do not serve in the army.

The IDF's doctrine at the strategic level is defensive, while its tactics are offensive. Though it has always been outnumbered by its enemies, the IDF maintains a qualitative advantage by deploying advanced weapons systems many of which are developed and manufactured in Israel for its specific needs. The IDF's main resource is the high calibre of its soldiers. The IDF's three service branches (ground forces, air force and navy) function under a unified command, headed by the chief-of-staff, with the rank of lieutenant general who is responsible to the Minister of Defence.<sup>8</sup>

Education and knowledge have preserved the Jewish people for generations. The IDF is not only a means of defending the country but also promotes a range of educational and cultural initiatives for soldiers. The army contributes a valuable and dynamic social function alongside its military and security role. It is a means of integrating and building Israeli society.<sup>9</sup> Society is involved to an unparalleled extent in the military. In a country that has housed millions of Jewish immigrants and refugees from all over the world, one cannot overemphasise the role the army has played as a social leveller. People from all social, economic and political backgrounds perform military service side by side with equal conditions and rights.<sup>10</sup> The IDF is responsive to the cultural and social needs of its soldiers, providing recreational and educational activities, as well as personal support services.

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8. See, "Israel Defense Forces: History and Overview," *Jewish Virtual Library*. URL: [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society\\_&\\_Culture/IDF.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society_&_Culture/IDF.html), accessed July 25, 2013.

9. For details see, *IDF Background and Information*, URL: <http://www.mahal-idf-volunteers.org/information/background/content.htm>, accessed November 16, 2013.

10. See, *IDF background Information*, URL: <http://www.mahal-idf-volunteers.org/information/background/content.htm>, accessed July 26, 2013.

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The army's code of ethics features a section on "purity of arms" reinforcing the image among Israelis that their army upheld humanistic universal values even under fire. The army also performed (and continues to perform) in an important social role as a primary melting pot and equaliser for a country of immigrants. From the age of 18 every Israeli male and female is required to serve three to two years, respectively, of compulsory military service. That requirement brought the rural kibbutz resident together with the urbanite, the modern Orthodox together with secular, and the Sabra (native Israeli) together with the immigrant. This also served to reinforce the country's egalitarian spirit.<sup>11</sup>

#### **CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS: GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

Military service in Israel is compulsory for both men and women. The Israeli military is based on a gendered division of labour and a gendered structure of power. Women constitute approximately a third of the conscripts and close to twenty per cent of the standing professional army. During the Knesset debates about the Security Service Law (1949), the principle of compulsory service for Jewish women was supported by all except the religious parties. After all, women had served alongside men in combat units during the War of Independence (1947-1948). Under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion, women participated in national security and were given sufficient military training to be able to defend the country in case of attack.<sup>12</sup>

The religious parties viewed the integration of women in the military as harmful because of their physical condition, the impact on morality in the institution and feared impact on the birth rate. The secular forces viewed

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11. Joshua Mitnick, "The Israeli Defense Forces," *My Jewish learning*, URL: [http://www.myjewishlearning.com/israel/Contemporary\\_Life/Society\\_and\\_Religious\\_Issues/Compulsory\\_Army\\_Service.shtml?p=1](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/israel/Contemporary_Life/Society_and_Religious_Issues/Compulsory_Army_Service.shtml?p=1), accessed July 25, 2013.

12. Dafna N. Izraeli, "Israel Defense Forces," *Jewish Women's Archive*, URL: <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/israel-defense-forces>, accessed July 25, 2013.

the integration of women as self-evident just as they saw the exclusion of married and pregnant women as obvious. In the end religious parties and the ruling party agreed that Jewish men and women were conscripted on unequal terms.<sup>13</sup>

The National Service Law (1953) specifies groups of persons that are automatically exempted from service: married women, pregnant women and mothers, Christian and Muslim women. Further, in 1978, the government of Menachem Begin (Likud) enacted a law allowing women to be exempted for religious reasons if they wanted. However, the Law does not exempt men for reasons of religion, conscience, or marital status.<sup>14</sup> The length of service is different too; men have to serve for three years and women for two. Regulations have changed a couple of times both in 1993 and 1994, and the length of service for women was cut back.

Military socialisation and instruction in Israel begin at kindergarten and schools. In school, Israel Jewish youths prepare themselves to join the military forces. Members of the IDF hold lectures to give information and impressions of life in the Israeli army. Some youths volunteer for special units or undergo pre-induction courses. Gender differences are already at work at this stage because boys and girls are separated.<sup>15</sup> The female soldiers in the IDF have an additional, non-assigned though culturally encouraged function. With their visible feminist, in sharp contrast to the rugged, army milieu, women soldiers serve as nurturing factor especially in the combat units. They soften the atmosphere in the unit bringing to the barracks a touch of warmth and effect, reminiscent of home and family. In 2000, the parliament abolished the combat restriction for women. Even if figures have changed during the last decade, women in the Israeli defence forces are still overrepresented in person and administrative profession. The other most popular areas for women have to do with education, welfare and communications.

The centrality of the military and security in society leads to a marginalisation of women on a symbolic level. Because they are not

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13. Klein Uta, "The Gender Perspective of Civil-Military Relations in Israel Society," *Current Sociology*, vol. 50 (5). September 2002, p. 671.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., pp. 672-73.

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regarded as capable of defending the country and taking part in security discourse, in the public consciousness the soldier as a defender is male. As the concept of citizenship is associated with the right and the duty of defending the country, therefore, military service in the feminist discussion is often seen as a way to achieve political rights. The inclusion of women in the military allows them to be militarised but not to be empowered. On the contrary the "security question" is used to keep women quiet, to exclude them from far-reaching political functions.

Although the Israeli army is still perceived as the main mechanism for building a national identity, it has become the basis of male self-image and a source of male social mobility in society. The military turns out to be the main agent in shaping and constructing gender roles in the society. Though women's role in the military service is visible, males continue to dominate and hold many of the top positions. Despite its importance, until the end of the 1970s the military was not a focus for interest-group formation and mobilisation in feminist politics. The brilliant military victory of 1967 was an affirmation of male hegemony and endowed the military with almost sacred proportions. The 1973 war created a social climate where the status of women in defence was more acceptable than before. The Knesset committee on the status of women, established in 1992, was an important factor in putting pressure on the military to implement greater gender equality.<sup>16</sup>

The IDF is most progressive in the world—when measured in terms of gender equality. Almost a third of the defence forces and 50% of its officers are female. In the UK, only 13% of the armed forces are women, while in

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16. Dafna N. Izraeli, n. 12.

the US, it is only slightly more at 13.4%.<sup>17</sup> The IDF considers equality as a leading ethic and includes women in almost every mission. The state of Israel is the only country in the world that requires women to serve in the military as mandatory. This obligation makes the IDF include the entire society contributing for the nations' security. The IDF continues to work on incorporating women while maintaining a secure and professional environment. Today women make up 33% of the IDF, and the IDF stands out among the world's militaries for the high representation of women in its ranks.<sup>18</sup> The IDF gives an equal opportunity to empowerment of women through military service.

As such Israel's military is recognised as one of the world's most advanced in gender equality in military service. Representatives of foreign militaries are increasingly seeking guidance from the IDF in facilitating gender equality and preventing sexual harassment.<sup>19</sup>

### **CIVIL-SOCIETY AND MILITARY IN ISRAEL**

According to Helman (1997), the participation of males in the military rests upon its construction in terms of community which is experienced as overlapping with society as a whole. Belonging to this community of warriors is seen as an entitlement that legitimises participation in the associations of civil society.<sup>20</sup> June 1967 witnessed the emergence of religious-nationalism as a powerful force in Israeli politics, it also served to focus attention on the development of civil society in the Jewish state. According to Augustus Richard Norton, the application of the term "civil society" in the region has come to be associated with groups and organisations that are inclusive in their membership and act as a buffer between the state and citizen.<sup>21</sup>

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17. Nick Hopkins, "The Israeli Defence Forces: First for Women," *The Guardian*, July 9, 2012, URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2012/jul/09/israeli-defence-forces-women-equality>, accessed on July 27, 2013.

18. "Women of IDF," URL: <http://www.idf.il/1589-en/Dover.aspx>, accessed July 27, 2013.

19. "IDF Leads the Way in Gender Integration," *Israel Defense Forces*, URL: <http://www.idfblog.com/2013/07/22/article-idf-leads-the-way-in-gender-integration/>, accessed on July 27, 2013.

20. Helman Sora, "Military and the construction of community," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, vol. 25, Winter 1997, pp. 305-32.

21. Augustus Richard Norton, "The Future of Civil Society in the Middle East," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 47(2) 1993, p. 211.

The war in Lebanon broke the agreement between the states, civil society and the army, creating a social and political division in Israeli society that persists to this day. One of the main characteristics of the war was that its objectives were never really explained to public opinion or indeed to the Israeli government by its perpetrators—Ariel Sharon, Rafael Eiter and Menachem Begin.<sup>22</sup> In 1982, Prime Minister Begin launched “Operation Peace for Galilee,” which was an invasion of Lebanon. It was condemned by the world and much of its own when Christian fighters massacred hundreds of Palestinian civilians as the Israeli army stood by. The Operation went wrong for Israel.<sup>23</sup> The invasion of Lebanon was therefore central to the socio-political and cultural changes which took place in Israeli society in the 1980s, 1990s and in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the position held in Israeli society by the army was devalued. The peace movement and the protest against military policy in Israel emerged as a consequence of the trauma of October 1973. Until then, the Israeli population had total confidence in the government, the army and the policy of military security. In the years of the state’s existence this policy has led to the three wars (1948, 1956 and 1967) which not only demonstrated Israel’s military superiority over its neighbours but also added territories under Israeli control.<sup>24</sup>

The end of the 1980s and the start of the 1990s saw a flourishing of associations in Israel, representing different needs, wishes and even visions. The new phenomenon marked a significant change compared to the collectivist character of the past, in which the Israeli main organising principle was based on effective control of state bureaucracies and institutions over nearly all spheres of life. The new cultural-political phenomenon appeared in the form of protest, guided by grass-roots organisations, non-profit associations, new social movements and even new political parties. According to the government registrar of non-profit associations, there are close to 32,000 such associations

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22. Yahni Sergio, “State, Civil Society and Army in Israel,” *International View Point*, March 10, 2001, URL: <http://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article698>, accessed July 29, 2013.

23. “1982 Lebanon Invasion,” *BBC News*, May 6, 2008, URL: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7381364.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7381364.stm), accessed July 29, 2013.

24. See, Yahni Sergio, “State, Civil Society and Army in Israel.”



in Israel today.<sup>25</sup>

Refusal to serve in the army is considered as personal choice. There is no precise data but various sources have announced that only 20% of reserve soldiers comply with their annual service and around 30% of young men refuse to comply with their compulsory military service.<sup>26</sup> During the first Lebanese war in 1982 there was total symbiosis between state and citizens where one could sacrifice everything to defend the country. The Israeli society is experiencing the trend in which universal cosmopolitan principles clash with a conflicting set of principles that are local, particularistic and even fundamentalist in character. There is a new cultural-political phenomenon appearing in the form of protest, guided by grass-roots organisations, non-profit associations, new social movements and even new political parties. But with the weak civil society, exponents of the military society in Israel continue to engage in a struggle to force Israel to continue to use its military power especially against the Palestinians. The al-Aqsa intifada demonstrates the influence upon a conflict reality, not only of the army generals and the statesman (who are frequently ex-generals themselves), but of Israeli military society as well.<sup>27</sup>

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25. Uri Ben-Eliezer, "The Civil Society and the Military Society in Israel," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economic and Culture*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2005, URL: <http://www.pij.org/details.php?id=329>, accessed July 29, 2013.

26. See, Yahni Sergio, "State, Civil Society and Army in Israel."

27. Uri Ben-Eliezer, n. 25.

## ISRAEL: A NATION IN ARMS

The nation-in-arms was portrayed as a model of relations between the civil and military sectors, in which the boundaries between the two are fragmented.<sup>28</sup> It made possible, on the one hand, to conceive of expanding the army's role and intervention in building the nation, a phenomenon that Horowitz and Lissak termed "partial militarisation" of the civil sector, as well as, on the other hand, to bring about an increase in the influence of civilians and their involvement in the military sector. For example, through Israel's unique system of service in the reserves, which transformed the army into a people's army imbued with the democratic and civil (some added egalitarian) spirit characteristic of the general society.<sup>29</sup>

Israel military sociologist has accepted Ben-Gurion's idea of rationalisation. Relying on theories of nation building and modernisation to perceive the army as an agent of development and integration,<sup>30</sup> these sociologists wrote on the varied functions of the Israeli army and its expanding role in the civilian sphere. The army is said to contribute to the immigration absorption and act as a melting pot for Jewish ethnic groups. The army also played a crucial role in controlling the Israel-Arab citizens in the 1950s and early 1960s over their exclusion from participating in the nation-formation process.<sup>31</sup>

Ever since attaining independence in 1948, arms procurement at constantly higher levels of sophistication has remained a principal factor in Israeli military preparedness. Israel launched its military industry on

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28. David Rapoport, "A comparative theory of Military and political types," in Samuel P. Huntington (ed.), *Changing Patterns of Military Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1962), pp. 71-100; Adam Roberts, "Nation in Arms, The Theory and Practice of Territorial Defence" (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976).

29. Dan Horowitz, "The Israeli Defense Forces: A Civilized Military in a Partially Militarized Society" in Roman Kolkowiaz and Andrei Korbowski, *Soldiers, Peasants and Bureaucrats* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp. 77-106.

30. John J. Johnson (ed.), *The role of the military in underdeveloped countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962); Lucian P. W. Pie, "Armies in the process of political modernization," in Johnson, *The role of the military*, pp. 69-89; Moshe Lissak, "Military and Modernization" (California: Sage, 1976).

31. Baruch Kimmering, "Sociology, Ideology and Nation Building: The Palestinians and their Meaning in Israel Society," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 57(4): pp. 46-60, in Uri Ben-Eliezer, "A Nation-in-Arms: State, Nation and Militarism in Israel's First Years," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 37(2), April 1995, p. 266.

a large scale in the wake of the June 1967 war. Since then, Israel has developed one of the most advanced and sophisticated arms industries in the world. Israel embarked on an all-out policy of self-sufficiency trying to develop and produce all its defence needs. This sense of urgency to achieve independence from foreign suppliers led the country into an unprecedented industrial revolution, the main thrust of which was directed towards the manufacture of military equipment. By 1981, Israel had unlimited potential in the military, industrial and security fields and was able to produce everything it needed to protect itself. The Israeli defence industry enjoys considerable support from the US government. Israel has enhanced its position as a supplier of critical components to militaries around the world.<sup>32</sup>

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### **ROLE OF MILITARY IN POLITICAL LIFE**

Since the founding of the state no institution has played such a dominant role as the Zvah Haganah Le Israel Defense Forces. It has been and remains the ultimate guarantor of Israel's security and is the most powerful military force and the most technologically advanced in West Asia. But equally, the IDF was conceived by David Ben-Gurion as a means to integrate a largely disparate population into a collective whole, thereby allowing a homogeneous national identity to be moulded. In this respect, the role assigned to the IDF reached beyond the immediate demands of national security to embrace the social educational as well as economic development of the state.<sup>33</sup>

The central role that the IDF has played in the development of the state has led to an intense debate over civil-military relations in the Jewish state.

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32. See, Farah Naaz, "Israel's Arms Industry," *Indian Institute of Defence and Analysis*, URL: <http://www.idsa-india.org/an-mar00-5.html>.

33. Clive Jones and Emma C. Murphy, *Israel Challenges to Identity, Democracy and the State* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 51.

Israel has been described as a “democratic garrison state” or as having a “civilised military.” Many Israelis have intimate associations with the military and that undermines the democratic system of government.<sup>34</sup> National security needs will severely restrict civil liberties, and the military will become the dominant institution of government. This has not happened in Israel, because of the institutional arrangements. Military sociologist Morris Janowitz has argued that Israel’s military is professional and therefore accepts civil authority. IDF is not recruited from separate social groups but rather reflects society as a whole. It is neither corporatist nor alienated from civil society, which are necessary conditions for intervention in politics.<sup>35</sup>

Uri Ben-Eliezer claims that Israel is a militaristic society. The term is useful for describing a tendency to view organised violence and wars as legitimate means of solving political problems. It is a social and cultural phenomenon that usually has political consequences for the decision making process, it is belief in the inevitability of war.<sup>36</sup> The argument put forward by Ben-Gurion was that the existential demands of securing Israel against the armies of the Arab world has resulted in organising Israeli society and that it is a “nation in arms.” Accordingly, militarism in Israel has actually allowed a democratic tradition to flourish. The energies of the military have been directed towards ensuring external security, a goal achieved with the full support of the civilian establishment.<sup>37</sup> Ben-Eliezer points to the concept of “parachuting” as evidence of how the military have come to penetrate the civilian sphere of government. Israeli political sphere is replaced with former IDF officers who have completed their military service and enter the political sphere.

The most frequent instances of this tendency have occurred during the demobilisation of officers in postwar period following the 1948, 1967

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34. Ibid, p. 52.

35. For details see D. Horowitz and M. Lissak, *Troubles in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity of Israel* (New York: Suny Press, 1989).

36. Uri Ben-Eliezer, “Rethinking the Civil-Military Relations Paradigm,” *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 30 (3): June 1997, p. 360.

37. Clive Jones and Emma C. Murphy, *Israel Challenges to Identity, Democracy and the State* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 52.

and 1973 wars. Until the June 1967 war, the great majority of reservist or retired officers joined Labours ranks. In the 1950s the first generation of such officers included Moshe Dayan, Yigal Allon, Israel Galilee and Chaim Herzog. After 1967, the number of such officers co-opted into the political elite rose sharply, with many for the first time joining the centre-right parties. Among those joining the Labour party were Yitzhak Rabin, Haim Barlev, Aharon Yariv and Meir Amit; Ezer Weizman, Ariel Sharon, Mordechai Zipori and Shlome Lahat joined Likud. Despite their widespread participation in politics, these ex-military officers have not formed

distinct pressure groups. The armed forces have generally remained shielded from partisan politics.<sup>38</sup> Yet a progressive and civilian oriented military can and does play a reformist role in stable progressive political system where military intervention can easily be crushed by popular government support. In Israel retired military men who entered politics had succeeded in capturing the enthusiasm of the electorate.<sup>39</sup>

Israel's political system is open to greater interaction between the civilian leadership and the military high command. The chief of IDF meets regularly with the committee on foreign affairs and the Knesset committees. The Chief of Staff of IDF gives opinions and suggestions on government's security policy.<sup>40</sup> The citizens did not regard the practice of retired officers "parachuting into politics" as threatening to civilian control of the military. No ex-IDF officer had assumed a cabinet position until 1955. Israel law prohibited retired officers from running for the Knesset until 100 days after

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38 "Civil Military Relations," URL: <http://countrystudies.us/israel/105.htm>, accessed on July 30, 2013.

39. Perlmutter Amos, *Politics and The Military in Israel 1967-77* (London: Frank Cass, 1978), p. 190.

40. Karim El-Gendy, *The Process of Israeli Decision Making: Mechanisms, Forces and Influences*, (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2010), p.84.

their retirement, but no such law existed regarding cabinet positions. Even retired officers pursuing political careers can be called back to active duty as they remained reserve officers until fifty-five years of age.<sup>41</sup>

For Ben-Eliezer, the real threat to democratic government comes from “praetorianism,” defined as a situation in which military officers play a predominant political role owing to their actual or threatened use of force.<sup>42</sup> The Lebanon experience raised in its most acute form the question of how effectively the civilian government could control the military establishment. IDF operations ordered by Ariel Sharon and Eitan often had been contrary to the government’s decision and the cabinet had been kept ignorant of the military situation. The checks and balances that had previously prevented the defence establishment from dominating the civilian decision-making authority seemed in jeopardy. Although no structural changes were introduced, Sharon was removed from the Ministry of Defence and a more normal pattern of military-civilian relations was restored.<sup>43</sup>

### **POLITICAL-MILITARY COOPERATION NORM**

Scholars of civil-military relations have argued that Israel disproves Harold Laswell’s classic “garrison state” thesis which posits that a state that is constantly at war cannot remain democratic and that its society will cease to be an open society. National Security will severely restrict civil liberties, and the military will become the dominant institution of government. This has not happened in Israel. The reason for the Israeli case, they claimed, lay in the quality of the country’s institutional arrangement.<sup>44</sup> What explained the Israeli case, according to all of these scholars, was the IDF’s identity as a citizen army: the IDF reflects the “mosaic” from which Israeli society is comprised; the early retirement of officers prevents the formation of a closed military case; the reserve duty requirement has the effect of weaving the military into the civil system. The military’s life is influenced by the

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41. See, “Israel: The Military in Political Life,” URL: <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-6855.html>, accessed on October 6, 2013.

42. See, Uri Ben-Eliezer, n. 36, p.360.

43. n. 41.

44. Dan Horowitz, “Is Israel a Garrison State?” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, vol. 4. 1997, pp. 58-75.

civilian way of life and is not different from it. It is normal for military personnel to patrol in the streets of Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. In sum, it is the existence of permeable boundaries between the civilian sector of society and the military sector, which engenders civil-military harmony in Israel. Contrary to the predictions of the "Garrison state" thesis Israeli society is not militarised but, on the contrary, the army is civilianised.<sup>45</sup> In the 1990s, an alternative school of thought arose among scholars of Israeli society. Their claim was not a case of military civilianisation but rather of civil society's militarisation at the hands of political elite and the state's apparatus as part of the latter's attempt to use the war and the military to bring about and then preserve their ethno-national supremacy.<sup>46</sup>

Another group of researchers who built on Samuel Huntington's theory noted the high degree of institutionalisation of politics in Israel and classified it as a "mature democracy" which creates both "objective" and "subjective" civil control of the military. In other words, there are simultaneous mechanisms of civil control that act on the military from the outside, and internal mechanisms, particularly the internalisation of the value of loyalty to the political leadership. Harmony in civil-military relations, the IDF's character as a citizen's army and the existence of boundaries between the civil and the military spheres have led researchers to argue that a clear hierarchy exists between the civilian echelon and military echelon which is subordinate to it. The continued civil control of the military elite serves as a functional defence against the danger of injury to the democratic character of Israeli society.<sup>47</sup>

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45. Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, "Trouble in Utopia: The overburdened Polity of Israel," Albany New York. 1989. Also see, Yoram Peri, "The Political Military complex: The IDF's influence over Policy toward the Palestinians since 1987," *Israel Affairs*, vol. 11 (2): April 2005, p. 328.

46. Yoram Peri, "The Political Military complex: The IDF's influence over Policy Toward the Palestinians since 1987," *Israeli Affairs*, vol. 11 (2): April 2005, p. 328.

47. Yoram Peri, *The Israeli Military and Israel's Palestinian Policy: From Oslo to the Al-Aqsa Intifada*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2002, p. 11.

**The existence of permeable boundaries between the military sector and the political sector shows a clear chain of command with the highest ranks of the civilian authority. Most importantly, IDF serves as an instrument for executing policy formulated and dictated by the political branch. This conception constitutes part of the hegemonic position of the Israeli political-military elite.**

branch. This conception constitutes part of the hegemonic position of the Israeli political-military elite. The political-military partnership model arose in Israel due to the constant state of war. It constitutes Israel's unique answer to the "garrison state" dilemma. Though Israel did not become Sparta and the military did not seize power, neither can Israel be called Athens, since the constant state of war engenders constraints on its democratic system. Since the formation of Israel, the military sector in the 1990s saw the beginning of a shift. One of the central factors contributing to the shift was the constant political crisis as a result of Israel's central problem since 1967—the

occupied territories and relations with the Palestinians.<sup>48</sup> Other important factors contributing to the military status was the change in the nature of modern warfare.

From the beginning of the 1990s, the IDF began promoting its political conception within the Israeli policy arena. Yitzhak Rabin's appointment as defence minister created a very strong axis and expressed to the utmost the political-military partnership model. Rabin did not want the IDF to be involved in the secret talks that led to the Oslo Accords in 1993, but from the moment the Accords were signed, the military was a central player in the political process. IDF officers participated in actual diplomatic meetings and in influencing public opinion. In all of the activities, the role played by the civilian branch within public service was marginal. Further, it was not the state civil servants, but rather the political leadership itself which served as the military officers' interlocutors. The main military body that dealt with the peace process during the 1990s was the strategic planning

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48. Yarom Peri, n. 46, p. 329.



division, which was responsible for consolidating the fieldwork discussion with the Palestinians, Jordan and Syria.<sup>49</sup> The profound weakness at the political level: the unwillingness of politicians to make clear and resolute decisions regarding territory has hampered the peace process in West Asia.<sup>50</sup>

In the course of the year preceding the fall of the Ehud Barak government in February 2001, there were significant disagreements between the government and the military regarding defence policy. The military treated the intifada as a war in every respect. The government on the other hand, though it agreed with the military's assessment that "war ought to be fought like a war," continued at the same time to engage in political negotiations.

The distinguishing features of political-military partnership consist in the fact that despite the military's high level of involvement in formulating policy, in the final analysis it acts according to the directives of the political branch. Indeed there have been so many cases in which the military radically altered the decisions made by the political branch, or in which it did not do what was asked of it. Nevertheless there exists a large amount of space in which to manoeuvre, short of such extreme actions. In 2001, the IDF allowed itself vast interpretative leeway in the implementation of the government policy.

The Israeli Defense Forces is a citizen's army. It reflects the mosaic of which civil society is composed; the early retirement of officers prevents the formation of a close military caste; the reserve service prevents alienation

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49. Ibid., pp. 329-30.

50. Ibid.

**Israel's army is part of its society, its personnel and political concepts, and its ideology are part of the Israeli national lifestyle. It is not an independent unit seeing itself in opposition to the civilians who control it. Thus, despite the extraordinary role and performance of the military in Israel, there has been a consistent persistence of civilian rule over the military, and civilian-military relations have not been a problem.**

and isolation of the military from civilian society; the integration of the military in the civil system prevents the growth of corporatism; and the military lifestyle in Israel hardly differs from the civilian lifestyle, as reflected in the careless dress of the reserve soldiers who fill the city streets. The existence of permeable boundaries between the civil and military spheres creates harmony in civil-military relations. Such permeability is true of the various social spheres as well as the political sphere. Israel society is not militarised despite the prediction of the garrison state thesis. On the contrary, the military has become civilianised.<sup>51</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Israel is the only democratic state in West Asia with a stable economy. When the Arab Spring flared up across West Asia and the North African States in 2010, Israel was an exception which was not affected by any of the turmoil. IDF performs the task of the traditional army-defence of the state and has not been seen as a threat to the political regime. There has never been a military coup in the history of Israel. The elite of the Israel defence forces has shown a continued confidence in the political system, although there are occasional complaints about some of the individuals who run it and their political views and perspectives. Civilians continue to control the military and do so by virtue of their dominant politics. Within the Israeli system, not because they control the military itself, but contributing to the limited role of the IDF in politics is its nature. It is a small standing force with a sizable reserve. Israel's army is part of its society, its personnel and political concepts, and its ideology are part of the Israeli national lifestyle.

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51. Yoram Peri, n. 47, p. 13.

It is not an independent unit seeing itself in opposition to the civilians who control it. Thus, despite the extraordinary role and performance of the military in Israel, there has been a consistent persistence of civilian rule over the military, and civilian-military relations have not been a problem. Today, despite a strong military and its participation in Israel life, decisions are still made at the political level. The Minister of Defence controls the defence establishment, usually with a firm hand. The military ought to carry out policy, not to determine it. Such civil-military relations in Israel do not exist in other West Asian countries.